

*'Til Death*

**An Honors Thesis (HONR 499)**

**by**

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#### Abstract

Modern American film holds steadfast to its age old archetypes and stories, often portraying idealized and glorified relationships based on love. A love that means everything, is worth sacrificing for, and only comes about once in a lifetime. It's shown as patient caresses and lustful kisses, as beautiful light that can illuminate a person's life. In reality, that type of relationship is destructive and harmful and there are no Hollywood lights to chase away the darkness it creates. This screenplay delves into a supernatural love story that explores the dark side of true love and ultimate dedication. The pre-production work show how the story is laid out and the process from taking it from a script to a film.

#### Acknowledgements

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'Til Death

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V.4

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FADE IN:

INT. COFFEE SHOP - AFTERNOON

The quaint shop is aflutter with the early afternoon rush. PATRONS talk in hushed tones that combine into a LOW RUMBLE while the line to the counter winds itself around the shop.

LIA, 26 with a Type-A personality and bored with the humdrum around her, looks up from the game on her phone and steps forward as the line moves, surveying the people around her.

A LOUD CRASH draws everyone's attention as a COLLAPSING MAN brings down a table with him. A half-eaten muffin spins on the floor.

Lia goes back to her game, using the opportunity to move ahead a step in line.

DISTRAUGHT WOMAN bends over her partner, cradling his head.

DISTRAUGHT WOMAN  
Someone call nine-one-one! He's  
having an allergic reaction!

The Patrons hurriedly obey, slowly closing in to get a glimpse of a dying man.

Lia steals the front space, and switches to a new game on her phone: Tinder. She swipes indifferently as SIRENS approach.

LIA  
(politely)  
Can I order?

The BARISTA tears her eyes away from the scene and back to the line. Lia smiles warmly.

LATER

The quiet activity in the shop has been replaced with a LOUD SILENCE, only the WHIR of the cappuccino machine and SOBS filling the space.

BARISTA  
Sorry about your wait.

Lia takes the two coffees from the counter.

(CONTINUED)



LIA  
It wasn't a problem.

She turns to leave as MAL enters. A stark contrast of dark and pale, the air literally shifts around him as a breeze from the closing door swirls in. She's caught off guard and almost drops the coffee. He looks at her and smiles, then walks toward the covered body.

INT. OFFICE - DAY

A bland sea of beige cubicles is surrounded on all sides by off-white offices. The door to one opens, and Mal guides Collapsing Man out, an appointment book in one hand.

MAL  
It is an adjustment, but the pamphlets will help.

Collapsing Man looks hesitantly at the stack of pamphlets clasped tightly in his hand. Mal puts a reassuring squeeze to his shoulder.

MAL  
It will be alright.

Collapsing Man looks up and nods his head, he starts to walk toward a set of metal double doors which seep a white light around the edges.

Mal rolls his eyes and sighs, checking his appointment book.

INSERT - APPOINTMENT BOOK

The month is laid out, in each date a series of places, times, and names. Every Saturday in red ink: Hospital, 3pm.

Half the month is crossed out, Saturday is not.

INT. HOSPITAL - NURSE'S STATION - DAY

The hospital wing is quiet, faint TV NOISES echo from down the hallway, patients occupied and relatively healthy.

Lia leans against the desk, taking the last sip of her coffee. ANGIE, 27 in dirty scrubs and a badge that reads "Head Nurse," taps her own coffee cup.

(CONTINUED)

ANGIE

One of these days maybe I'll buy  
the coffee.

LIA

I pay for coffee, you pay for wine,  
I think we're good.

Angie laughs.

ANGIE

I'm okay with that arrangement.

LIA

What else would I be doing Saturday  
afternoons? Watching HGTV?

ANGIE

Don't mock how I spend my off days!

A patient call button BEEPS from down the hallway.

ANGIE

Duty calls.

She gets up and hugs Lia goodbye before heading towards the  
room. Lia grabs her purse.

LIA

Shit I almost forgot. Angie, you  
left your pen at my place, it's on  
your desk!

Angie turns and waves thank you. Lia fishes an EPIPEN out  
of her purse and sets it next to Angie's cup. She grabs her  
own and walks down the

HALLWAY

toward the exit. She pauses to throw away her coffee cup,  
taking one last try at draining the remaining liquid. She  
tosses it and starts walking, only to run into

Mal. Perfect suit, briefcase, and surprised. His lips turn  
up at the corners.

MAL

Are you stalking me?

LIA

I could ask the same thing, seeing  
as I left first.

(CONTINUED)



MAL  
And without saying hello.

Lia smiles, begrudgingly.

LIA  
Hello.

Mal laughs, the briefcase switches hands and he offers a handshake, Lia accepts.

MAL  
I did not know you worked here.

LIA  
Just visiting, but I am here enough  
to know that you don't.

MAL  
Not for the hospital, but my job  
brings me here a lot.

Mal checks his watch.

MAL  
A job I should probably be doing  
right now.

Lia steps to the side and waves her arm.

LIA  
Proceed. Maybe I'll see you around.

MAL  
Count on it.

Lia looks after Mal as he walks away. He turns and smiles  
and her, then continues on.

EXT. HOSPITAL - BENCH - DAY

The sun is out and shining, Mal sits on a bench with his  
face turned up, smiling. Across the street DOCTORS and  
NURSES talk outside the ambulance bay.

Sighing, Mal sits forward and opens his eyes, reaching for  
his briefcase. He's about to get up when he sees Lia,  
carrying two coffees.

MAL  
Hey!

(CONTINUED)

Lia's head jerks, she spills the coffee as she sees Mal, he rushes over in guilt.

MAL  
I should not have yelled, I  
apologize.

Her right hand is bright red and still dripping with the burning hot coffee.

MAL  
Sorry is not going to un-burn your  
hands.

He reaches into his suit and pulls out a handkerchief, and dries off her hands, taking one of the coffees in exchange.

LIA  
What doesn't kill you, right?

She finishes cleaning her hands and trades the handkerchief for coffee.

LIA  
You're earlier than last week.

Mal nods his head, choosing instead to take in the sight of her.

LIA  
So, you said your job takes you  
here a lot, what would that be?

MAL  
It is...difficult to explain.

LIA  
Right.

MAL  
Basically, I am always on call, no  
time to myself. A lot of  
meetings. Too much one-on-one  
customer service in my opinion-

LIA  
Sounds pretty terrible.

Mal looks around, the grass and benches across the street, the cloudless sky, back to Lia.



MAL  
Main benefit is I get to live here.

LIA  
That's a benefit?

MAL  
Like you wouldn't believe.

Angie comes out the hospital exit.

ANGIE  
There you are! I'm starting to get  
a caffeine headache.

Mal nods to Lia and holds the door open for her. He looks out at the street before walking inside.

INT. OFFICE - DAY

Mal closes his door and heads towards the exit, his hand fidgeting with a notecard. DAVE, blonde floppy hair clashing with his austere suit, enters as Mal reaches for the door, bathing the threshold in light.

DAVE  
Woah, sorry man.

MAL  
No problem. Hey, do you have the  
three o'clock at the hospital?

Dave reaches into his suit and pulls out a planner.

DAVE  
(looking)  
Um, yeah.

MAL  
Could we trade? I have to head  
there later anyways.

Dave looks around, checking for their boss.

DAVE  
Sure, no problem.

They exchange notecards.

MAL  
Thanks.

They wave bye as Mal opens the door is flooded by white light.

EXT. HOSPITAL - BENCH - DAY

Lia sits on the bench, three coffees in a carrier next to her. She nervously plays with her hands.

Mal walks up to her, she waves to the seat next to her. He accepts.

MAL  
Three coffees?

Lia offers him one.

LIA  
Not too presumptuous?

MAL  
(taking it)  
More presumptuous than me showing  
up half an hour early for an  
appointment?

Lia smiles and sips her own. She looks him in the eye, he meets her gaze unblinkingly.

LIA  
I'm Lia.

MAL  
Nice to meet you, Lia. Mal.

They smile at each other and drink their coffees.

LATER

Mal's arm rests on the back on the bench, Lia is angled toward him, their knees almost touching.

LIA  
You cannot be serious!

MAL  
I am actually. Sometimes I slip up  
and say water closet out of habit.

LIA  
Your grandparents-

(CONTINUED)

MAL  
Are eccentric? My grandfather was  
also a big fan of speak-easies.  
Where the liquor-

A car SQUEALS to a halt across from them at the ambulance bay. MUFFLED VOICES from inside the car argue. A door OPENS, a THUD, and the car takes off before it can close again.

A battered and bloody body lays in its place.

Mal's focused on the body, Lia tries to get his attention back.

LIA  
Your grandfather must've been  
really old, to go to speak-easies.

Mal looks at her.

MAL  
What? Oh, uh, must have been my  
great grandfather then.

He looks back at the body. A pool of blood is forming.

LIA  
They'll get to it.

Mal doesn't look away.

LIA  
(to herself)  
Nothing like a corpse to ruin the  
moment.

She uncrosses her legs and shifts away from Mal. He snaps back.

MAL  
Sorry. But that, um, is my  
appointment.

He gets up and grabs his briefcase. He takes a step forward, then turns back to her, considering something.

MAL  
My job...it is...

He clears his throat and looks at the body before meeting Lia's eyes.



MAL  
Just, watch. Okay?

He crosses the street and bends down to look at MR. SMITH. Mal looks across the street and make eye contact, holding her gaze he touches the body.

A non-bloody version of Mr. Smith POPS out and stands to the side next to Mal and the bloody body. Mal hands him a notecard.

MAL  
Mr. Smith, if you would follow me?

Lia stares, incredulous. She grabs the leftover coffee and walks across the street, her eyes never leaving Mal's.

SCREECHING BRAKES, CAR HORN. Lia flinches and looks at the car that almost hit her.

DRIVER  
Watch it lady!

LIA  
Sorry.

She rushes across the street and looks for Mal amongst the new throng of HOSPITAL STAFF. They're both gone.

#### INT. LIA'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Decorated in rich earthtones, the small number of lamps give the space unintended mood lighting. A well loved brown couch and rescued Goodwill coffee table are the main fixtures of the living room.

Angie sits on the couch pouring a glass of wine. There's an empty bottle on the table. Lia stands next to the couch, holding a half full wine glass that sways as she gestures.

LIA  
(drunk)  
I'm not crazy.

ANGIE  
I think you've had enough.

Angie sets her glass down and takes Lia's. Downing the contents herself. Lia HUFFS and leaves.

In Lia's absence, Angie tries to hide the wine bottle.

(CONTINUED)

Lia returns with a bowl of pretzels and a cup of water, her face stuffed with sticks poking through her lips. Angie sees her and starts laughing. Lia sits down.

LIA  
(unintelligible)  
It makes sense-

ANGIE  
Wait!

Angie takes the bowl.

ANGIE  
Take a drink, I can't understand you.

Lia gulps down the water.

LIA  
It makes sense, he's always around dead people.

ANGIE  
(eating a pretzel)  
Look, I'm not encouraging this, but let's say you're right. What can you do about it?

Angie leans lazily against the back of the couch, her hand supporting her head.

EXT. BRIDGE - MORNING

The bridge is long and wooden, a low, metal rail stretching on either side. Benches scatter the wide walkway, which provides a view of the rushing river below, green trees reaching across it.

Lia looks out, the morning view breathtaking. She sits and reads a book: *Suicides of the Rich and Famous*.

LATER

Laying on her back with the book above her, she's about a third the way through. A WOMAN, skinny and in a t-shirt despite the chill, walks up to the railing across from her.

Lia sets the book on her chest, looks over, then up at the sky. She takes a deep breath, sits up, and sets the book down. Another deep breath and she walks up to the Woman.

They stand next to each other, silent for a minute.

(CONTINUED)



WOMAN

(quoting)

There comes a time when you look  
into the mirror and you realize  
that what you see is all that you  
will ever be.

LIA

Like nothing you'll ever do will  
matter again?

The Woman looks at Lia, her expression soft, and nods her  
head. She tosses a palmed rock into the river, losing it in  
the white foam.

LIA

(quoting)

Some people are just not meant to  
be in this world. It's just too  
much for them.

The Woman nods her head and breathes deeply, her exhale  
shaky.

WOMAN

(crying, quoting)

We cannot tear out a single page of  
our life, but we can throw the  
whole book in the fire.

LIA

Or the water.

Lia watches the Woman stare intently at the water. Behind  
her, at the edge of the bridge, Mal stands with his arms  
crossed. Slowly, Lia walks away, over to him.

LIA

I was hoping you'd show up.

MAL

Saturdays not good enough anymore?

Taking a step closer, Lia runs her hand up Mal's arm.

LIA

Not enough anymore.

Mal touches her face, his finger running along her jaw.

MAL

There are other ways to get my  
attention.

(CONTINUED)



LIA

Like?

Mal smiles, his thumb resting on her chin.

MAL

Okay, maybe not.

He leans forward, they kiss. SPLASH. Mal pulls away.

LIA

When can I see you next?

Mal turns to start walking.

MAL

I...uhh...

Lia holds on to arm.

LIA

This Wednesday at seven.  
Johnathon's Bistro.

Confused, Mal nods anyway, and Lia releases him. She watches him walk down the path to the river, she touches her lips and smiles.

INT. JOHNATHON'S BISTRO - NIGHT

Crowded, even for a Wednesday, hopeful patrons mill about waiting for an open table. Lia, dressed in a revealing black dress, approaches the podium.

LIA

Reservations for seven. Ophelia Watson. I'm early, I'll be at the bar.

HOSTESS

Okay, I'll come get you when your table's ready.

LIA

Thanks.

Lia approaches the

BAR.

She takes a seat next to CHAD, grade-A creeper dude, who looks her up and down.

(CONTINUED)

CHAD

Nice. Let me buy you a drink.

Lia forces a smile.

LIA

Only if you get one as well.

Chad puts a hand on her knee.

CHAD

Let me worry about that.

He wave the BARTENDER, Lia grits her teeth trying not to jerk away from his touch.

CHAD

Scotch, neat. And a, vodka martini.

His hand moves up her leg, he smiles and his teeth are tobacco stained. Lia runs a hand across her collar bone, discreetly pulling a vial out of her dress.

The Bartender brings the drinks, Lia reaches for her drink, using it as an excuse to move away.

CHAD

Cheers!

They clink glasses, neither one taking a large sip. Lia looks toward the Hostess, turning her entire body, and out of the corner of her eye, sees Chad put something in her drink. She turns back.

LIA

Could you get the bartender? He forgot the olive!

CHAD

You betcha.

Chad turns to flag down the Bartender, and Lia dumps quickly the vial in his drink. The Hostess comes up.

HOSTESS

Miss Watson, your table.

LIA

Oh, my table's ready. Thanks for the drink!

Lia follows the Hostess, leaving the martini behind. Chad angrily watches her go, downing his own drink at once.

(CONTINUED)



LATER

Lia and Mal sit across from each other, their glasses of wine half drunk. The appetizers only crumbs left on the plate.

MAL  
I am, surprised.

LIA  
About the restaurant or how good  
the calamari was?

Mal wipes his mouth with a cloth napkin.

MAL  
About your other choice.

Mal nods his head forward. Behind Lia, Chad sits at the bar, swaying on the stool.

LIA  
You've never had to watch your  
drink at a party.

Chad falls off the stool. Lia takes a drink of her wine.

LIA  
The world's safer without him.

MAL  
I was not asking for an  
explanation...I do not actually  
care.

Behind them, the Bartender tries to get Chad up, but he's limp.

LIA  
Now, that's surprising.

MAL  
Everyone is the same, prattling on  
about how they deserved more. As if  
they are special or more deserving.

LIA  
Sorry to give you extra work.

He takes her hand.

(CONTINUED)



MAL

As long as I get to see you,  
paperwork is fine. You make it  
interesting again.

Lia blushes and Mal kisses her hand.

BARTENDER

Is anyone here a doctor?!

Mal closes his eyes and gets up.

MAL

Tonight was nice.

He leans down and kisses Lia goodbye, she's breathless afterwards.

MAL

I'm a doctor!

Lia catches his hand as he leaves.

LIA

I'll see you Saturday. And Sunday,  
Mason Road, five miles after the  
highway exit. Two.

MAL

Busy girl.

He kisses her hand and walks over to the body of Chad.

EXT. GROCERY PARKING LOT - AFTERNOON

The parking lot is sparse this far away from the entrance. Lia whistles as she walks back to her car, tapping her leg on beat with a pair of pliers and a clump of wires.

She climbs into the drivers seat of the Toyota Camri and puts on the radio. POP MUSIC plays as a low HUM as she leans back in the seat.

LATER

"Jar of Hearts" fades out as the red pickup across from her pulls out of its space. Lia puts the car into gear.

INT./EXT. LIA'S CAR - AFTERNOON

The rural road grows bumpy, and the music SKIPS. Annoyed, Lia turns it off. Lia watches the trees blur past, slowing down to see them more clearly.

Ahead, tires SCREETCH and there's a CRASH. Whistling, Lia drives slowly past a small fire, the pick up flipped over, and swerves to avoid a rolling tire in the road. She pulls over.

From the back of her car she pulls out a blanket and a picnic basket, she lays them out in the road. Out of the basket she pulls two candles. Lia walks over to the fire, part of seat cushion, and lights the candles.

From the pick up there's MOANING.

Lia walks back to the blanket, Mal is there setting up the food.

MAL

Homecooked? You spoil me.

LIA

Given the atmosphere, I figured it could use the extra touch.

Lia sets the candles down and pulls Mal toward her in a kiss.

INT. OFFICE - DAY

The office is bustling with activity, REFUGEES wander in the bullpen as REAPERS try to help them in cubicles. There's a BUZZING of foreign tongues.

Behind his office door Mal is being YELLED AT by the CRASH VICTIM.

The door swings open.

MAL

Ma'am, I really need you to calm down!

Crash Victim runs into the hallway, she throws a stack of pamphlets at Mal's face.

CRASH VICTIM

You were there!

(CONTINUED)



MAL

Yes, I took you from the crash. Do you want me to explain this again?

At the end of the hallway, a large office door with an elaborately intricate frame swings open. A large, imposing man in a suit stands silhouetted in the doorway. PETER.

PETER

Dave! Take Mal's client. Mal. Office.

Dave leaves the a group of Refugees and walks up to Crash Victim and puts a comforting arm around her. She bursts into tears.

DAVE

(to Mal)

I got it man. Don't wanna keep Peter waiting.

Mal closes his door and walks down the hallway, trying not to panic.

INT. PETER'S OFFICE - DAY

Everything is stark white except the chairs, black leather in modern style. The office exudes importance and status.

Peter sits behind the large desk, hands folded, face carefully masked annoyance. In a chair across from him is Chad.

Mal stands awkwardly at the door, his stomach in knots.

PETER

Take a seat, Mallory.

Chad guffaws.

CHAD

Knew a pussy like you'd have a girl's name.

Mal takes a seat. His jaw clenched.

MAL

Peter.

Peter hands Mal a file from his desk. Mal's name at the top.

(CONTINUED)



PETER

Chad has filed a complaint against you. The details are listed in the file, but the general idea is that you helped orchestrate his demise.

MAL

That is ridiculous! Why would I do that?

CHAD

For that slut, I seen him talking to her.

Mal does his best to look incredulous. Peter sighs.

PETER

(to Chad)

Thank you for your time, the matter is officially under investigation. If you could wait outside, someone will be ready to escort you onward.

Chad huffs, but complies. Peter isn't the sort of man to pick a fight with. He leaves, grumbling out the door.

PETER

Now, the jumper didn't complain, but in her statement she also mentioned a woman.

Mal thumbs through his file.

PETER

The woman out there makes the third name to suddenly appear on your list. Without coming from us.

Mal looks up, meeting Peter's gaze.

PETER

We can't have that. Someone going rogue.

MAL

I understand.

PETER

We'd have to set an example.

Mal swallows. His throat dry, his words come out as barely a whisper.

(CONTINUED)

MAL  
I understand.

INT. HOSPITAL - NURSE'S STATION - DAY

Angie gulps down the coffee, HISSING as it burns her tongue.  
Lia leans against the desk.

LIA  
Take it easy, Angie.

ANGIE  
Sorry, busy day. Three code blues  
since my lunch break.

LIA  
Damn.

Angie sits in a chair.

ANGIE  
Yes. Distract me.

LIA  
Well, things are good. For me and  
Mal.

ANGIE  
You mean since you stopped thinking  
he was a Grim Reaper?

LIA  
Something like that.

Angie leans forward.

ANGIE  
So? Details?

Lia laughs.

LIA  
(thoughtfully)  
Everything was so boring before  
him, and now my heart races.

ANGIE  
Not the details I was asking for.

Lia winks at her. They both burst out laughing.

Mal walks up to them. Angie makes herself busy, but gives  
Lia a look.

(CONTINUED)

MAL  
I need to talk to you.

EXT. HOSPITAL - BENCH - DAY

Mal sits with his head in his hands, Lia rips her empty coffee cup into little pieces.

LIA  
That bad?

MAL  
This job is all or nothing. I mean,  
nothing.

LIA  
What if you just ran off?

Mal sits up, contemplating.

MAL  
Would you come with me?

LIA  
(forlorn)  
How would I?

The paper cup is no more, Lia scatters its remains.

MAL  
I could take you. Then it would  
just be us, running away.

Mal reaches for her hand.

LIA  
And by take, you mean?

Mal kisses her hand before holding between his own. He nods.

MAL  
It cannot last forever.

LIA  
Nothing ever does.



INT. LIA'S APARTMENT - DINING ROOM - NIGHT

The table is set. Red tablecloth, wine glasses, candles, two plates and silverware.

At the counter, Lia pours powder into a wine bottle. She shakes it then decants it, making sure it's fully dissolved. She sets it on the table.

Her phone BUZZES. "Unknown Number: Can't make it tonight, reschedule?"

Frustrated, Lia throws the phone and SCREAMS.

KITCHEN - LATER

Lia paces the galley kitchen, freshly made rolls steaming behind her. There's a KNOCK at the door.

LIA

Come in!

She bites her nail.

ANGIE

I can't believe he stood you up!

LIA

Yeah, but good for you right?

Angie sets her purse on a chair and grabs a wineglass and the bottle. She's still in scrubs.

ANGIE

I never pass up free food. Wine?

For a second, Lia considers smashing the bottle, she takes a step. Angie pours the wine.

LIA

Ah-no. Still cooking, need all my senses.

Lia turns to the oven, willing it to beep.

ANGIE

Your loss.

Angie downs the glass and pours another.

ANGIE

So, what romantic dinner are we having tonight?

(CONTINUED)

The oven BEEPS. Lia reaches in and pulls out-

LIA  
Lasagna.

ANGIE  
(slurred)  
Fancy. Oh, am I drunk already?

LIA  
(guilty)  
It's pretty strong wine.

Angie tries to set the glass down, but misses and it CRASHES to the floor.

ANGIE  
I'm so sorry! I'll get it.

Angie tries to bend down, but falls over. She tries to talk, but her mouth isn't working. Lia steps over her and puts the lasagna on the table.

The front door OPENS and CLOSES.

ANGIE  
(gulping)  
H-h-help.

FOOTSTEPS come down the hallway and into the dining room.

Lia gets a blanket from the couch and puts it on Angie.

LIA  
I'm sorry but you were the only  
other one I could call.

Mal walks over and touches Lia's shoulder.

MAL  
Sorry Angie. Dinner is growing  
cold.

LATER

The candles are burnt down, the plates smeared in sauce, and Lia's wineglass full.

Mal takes her hand from across the table. She drinks the glass quickly. Wincing at the end.

(CONTINUED)



MAL  
I will be back soon.

Mal kisses her forehead.

INT. OFFICE - DAY

Mal pushes Angie through the doors. Angry, and full of energy, she turns around and punches him in the face.

ANGIE  
What the fuck did you make her do?

MAL  
(rubbing his jaw)  
Angie, just calm down.

Angie lunges at him, clawing at his face.

ANGIE  
What have you done?

She's hysterical, close to tears. Mal holds her wrists away from him.

Peter's door opens.

PETER  
What's all the commotion?

MAL  
Nothing, sir.

Angie SCREAMS and resumes her attack, kicking Mal in the shins.

Peter steps into his office, and is back a moment later, striding down the hallway.

He peels Angie off Mal with ease.

PETER  
I've called security.

MAL  
Thank you.

ANGIE  
No! He did this! He made her do this!

Two GUARDS approach the three of them.

(CONTINUED)



PETER  
Take her to an office. Mal, with  
me.

Mal winces at the pain in his leg, limping. Peter walks to his office. Mal hesitates. A Guard pushes him forward.

INT. PETER'S OFFICE - DAY

Peter looks at papers on his desk. Mal stands behind the chairs. A Guard blocks the door.

Peter pulls out a list.

PETER  
Ah, here we are.

MAL  
Sir?

PETER  
We talked about this, Mal.

Peter hands him the list. Angie's name at the bottom in off-colored ink.

PETER  
You've been adding names. Names  
that shouldn't be there.

MAL  
I did not add any names, sir.

Lia's name appears.

Mal sucks in a breath.

MAL  
I have to go.

He starts to leave, Peter grabs his arm.

PETER  
(to the Guard)  
Send Dave.

GUARD  
Yessir.

INT. LIA'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Sitting on the floor, Lia pets Angie's hair.

LIA  
(slurred)  
Shhh, it'll all be okay. I'm so  
sorry.

Dave leans over the kitchen counter.

DAVE  
Hi, Lia.

LIA  
Who are you?

DAVE  
I'm Dave, Mal's not gonna make it.

Lia is upset, she tries to stand, grabbing the chair near her.

LIA  
No. Only Mal.

She collapses, bringing the chair down with her.

INT. PETER'S OFFICE - DAY

Mal rips his arm away and goes for the door.

Peter sighs, following after him.

Mal opens the door and runs into the

HALLWAY

Sprinting for the double doors.

INT. LIA'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

On her back, with a chair on her, Lia GRUNTS.

Dave watches from the counter, not interfering.

DAVE  
That's not gonna happen, sorry.

Lia pushes the chair off, but can't seem to sit up. She rolls over onto her stomach. Her face going slack.

INT. OFFICE - DAY

Two Guards body check Mal before he can reach the doors. They pull him off the ground, an arm each. He tries to thrash free.

Peter strides forward.

PETER

It's a shame, you were a good one.

Mal GRUNTS, trying to pulling free. Peter extends his hand.

Mal jerks away, but is held still.

INT. LIA'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Lia crawls on the floor, dragging useless legs behind her. Dave walks over to her and squats down.

INT. OFFICE - DAY

Peter touches Mal's forehead.

A burst of white light comes from Peter's touch, Mal's eyes and mouth flood with it.

His body goes limp.

INT. LIA'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Dave reaches his hand out to her.

Lia flinches and tries to scream, but only a GURGLE comes out.

Her world goes black.

FADE OUT.



## Prewriting

### *'Til Death*

- **Premise:**
  - It was love at first sight, and fate itself that kept drawing them together. But after discovering that Mal was a Grim Reaper, Lia turns to murder to spend more time together. As the bodies pile up their love grows ever stronger, and so does the suspicion.
- **Major Dramatic Questions:**
  - Will they get caught? Lia is murdering people, Mal is a willing accomplice.
  - Is it worth it? They're sacrificing people to be together, but at what cost to their own humanity.
- **Brainstorming:**
  - Since their attraction and romantic interest will be immediate the question of "will they be together" is short lived, probably only until the end of the first act or the midpoint, I'm not quite sure which plot point the first murder will be. However, the murdering will instigate the main MDQ which is "will they get caught?" At first it's a last ditch effort to get Mal's attention, but it becomes a steady source of their time together, and even a kind of foreplay. The murders become more hands on, and the lack of remorse increases, they get bolder and the people that Mal works for take notice. He is obviously breaking rules, which they object to, and when he doesn't stop they take action against them.
  - Mal and Lia find in each other an interest and understanding that they've never come across before, let alone had it been so easy and companionable. He's a Grim Reaper, death is literally his job, so his approach to it is impersonal, and when it becomes the opportunity to see the woman he loves it's not even a question he considers because the answer is so obvious. Lia is already slightly psychopathic, for her it's an unfortunate means to an end. It starts off as relatively "harmless" and when it works it just convinces her that this is the right thing to do. As each kill progresses though, it is less impersonal and she gets as much out of killing them as she does with being with Mal. This creates a conflict between them because he has to clean up afterwards and he's slightly jealous.

# Character Development

## *'Til Death*

- **External Objective/Obstacle:**
  - Lia wants to be with Mal. She wants to be able to have a somewhat normal relationship, and so everything she does that's abnormal is so that she can mimic normalcy with him.
- **Internal Objective/Obstacle:**
  - She needs Mal's love and affection, it is what pushes her to do horrible things. It's the connection that she needs, which she gets via Mal. Like Medea and Jason in Greek Mythology.
- **Internal/External Conflict: WANT versus NEED:**
  - It's not so much that they conflict, but that their combination is explosive and unhappy. Together they make her become a worse person, kind of, and even though she can see that, she doesn't really care. It's like she's unraveling herself.
- **The Source of the Protagonist's Need:**
  - Lia is a little psychopathic, not enough that people pick up on it, but she definitely feels disconnected from people in general. And with Mal, that connection was immediate and she doesn't really know how to feel about it, except that she wants more. Again like Medea and Jason, or more recently the way that Hannibal feels about Will Graham in NBC's Hannibal.
- **Unstable Ground/Restoring the balance:**
  - Lia's life is bland. She's stuck in her routine, which she likes and which is comfortable, but it's boring. And then here comes a guy and upsets everything and she can't help but wanting to go with it.
- **The Stakes:**
  - It's like watching a car accident, horrible, violent, but chaotically beautiful and you just can't look away. The two of them becoming monsters because of what they're willing to do, and in a way they do become monsters. But Mal's job finding out and taking action against them is the real threat that emerges and eventually is realized. If Mal were just taken away from Lia, or if he stopped showing up, she would go full on psychopath murder spree as a way to release her emotions and also as a way to try to engineer a meet up.
- **Character Arc:**
  - Lia goes from being a bored, un-empathetic, but relatively normal person to someone consumed with obsession and who kills indiscriminately to get what they want. It's an arc into inhumanity and chaos, and it's her being able to realize her want and need that fuel this. Her WANT/NEED are bad for her, they're destructive, but that doesn't mean she won't pursue them to her last breath.



# Story Layout

## *'Til Death*

- **Point of Attack**
  - Lia has no empathy, she cannot connect with other people. She's bored with the routine of life, and desperately wants something, anything, to come along and change it.
  - Mal is a Grim Reaper; he's relatively mid-level in the bureaucratic organization. He participates in the world, but at arm's length away, he can see why it's appealing but without experiencing it himself.
  - She's waiting in line at a coffee shop when someone dies, she could save them, but doesn't, but it's not worth her time.
- **Inciting Incident**
  - Mal is a Grim Reaper, he goes to the coffee shop to collect the soul and runs into Lia. Both of their lives are dull, and suddenly there's color. It's instantaneous, but neither of them thinks anything of it. Until they run into each other again.
- **Plot Point One**
  - They develop their own routine of running into each other, rearranging their schedules so they can have coffee for a few minutes, talk in the hallway, or spend any time at all together.
  - Mal reveals himself to Lia as a Grim Reaper. Surprised, intrigued, and saddened, Lia realizes the gap in their relationship. She tries to find a way to cross it.
- **Midpoint**
  - Killing people is a good way to cross that gap. Off the books and off the grid, Lia arranges murders that allow moments of privacy for her and Mal, and he tries to sneak their souls into the afterlife without anyone noticing.
- **Plot Point Two**
  - His boss totally noticed. Dead people are surprisingly vindictive, and launch complaints about their untimely demise's unusual circumstances. Management is very clear that if it doesn't stop that drastic measures will be taken, regarding both Lia and Mal.
- **Climax**
  - If Lia dies and Mal collects her soul, and then runs away with it, they can be together forever. That's the plan at least. But with one more murder to try and hide, everything falls apart. Mal is called into management, Lia is dying in her apartment, and it becomes glaring clear that there will be no happy ending.
- **Denouement**
  - Lia is collected by a stranger, she's distraught and fearful for her bleak afterlife. Mal has his position stripped away from him, and is sent off for a painful punishment to teach him to keep in line.

- Lia is collected by a stranger, she's distraught and fearful for her bleak afterlife. Mal has his position stripped away from him, and is sent off for a painful punishment to teach him to keep in line.



## Scene Impacts

### *'Til Death*

1. Introduction to the protagonist, Lia. It is the audience's first impression of her and sets up how she'll be perceived throughout the rest of the script. She's feminine, polite, bored, and heartless. These are the first inklings of what is to come, and how she could do the things she does toward the end.
2. Introduction to the love interest, Mal. There was only a brief look at him at the coffee shop, but here he is in his element. It's also the first in a series of clues as to what he does and what he is, I don't want to have to tell the audience I want them to be able to piece it together. This scene also helps establish his growing annoyance at his job and his lack of patience or empathy towards his clients. The end of the scene is very important because it establishes his connection to the hospital, and later on to Lia.
3. Introduction to the best friend, Angie. She humanizes Lia, Angie shows that there is a caring and fun side to her, which makes Lia less of a villain and more of an anti-hero. This scene also allows for Mal and Lia to run into one another again, and establishing their reasons for being at the hospital.
4. A week has passed, they keep to their schedules and both show up on Saturday again. Flirting commences, Mal reveals more about his job and his feelings toward it. This scene is mainly to have a second contact point at the hospital between them and to deliver exposition about Mal.
5. Another week passes and Mal very much wants to see Lia again. Dave is introduced as are some of the rules and logistics of being a Reaper. It also establishes that Mal is willing to break those rules.
6. Lia also wants to see Mal very much, taking the liberty to set up an impromptu coffee date. This shows her as being the one to take charge and escalate their relationship. It's a good date, they're comfortable around each other, Mal's age is hinted at, and when his "appointment" shows up Lia's reaction reveals her nature. Mal makes the decision to reveal himself to her. This is the end of Act I.
7. Lia is not a very liable character, but this scene softens her. She's like anyone else talking about boys with her best friend over wine. This scene endears Angie to the audience, and shows the positive influence she has on Lia, that Angie is the one who brings out Lia's compassion and empathy.
8. A direct answer to Angie's question, this is what Lia decides to do. Wait around for someone to die and hope that Mal shows up. Waiting is her original intention, but when the Woman shows up Lia doesn't want this opportunity to go away. So she shifts from being an observer to a passive participant. It's a small escalation, but it's the first step down this very dark path she'll end up taking. Her risk is rewarded, Mal shows up and they have their moment. So for Lia, who does not have empathy towards strangers, and has no moral dilemma about causing someone's death, she's already primed for her next escalation.



9. It's their third date, time to scale it up a bit. Lia goes from nudging a suicidal woman to jump to poisoning someone. She's no longer a passive participant but a very active one, she's an outright murderer now. Still, she has some semblance of morality, she doesn't kill indiscriminately she chooses a guy who tried to drug and date rape her. More is revealed about Mal's job and his feelings toward Lia. By the end Lia already has a plan for their next date. Another escalation. This is the Midpoint.
10. This scene is purely a set up for scene eleven. It shows what Lia's doing and provided context for what is about to happen.
11. No longer carefully choosing people, no vague vigilante reasoning, this person is random and innocent, merely a tool for Lia to use to get what she wants. She doesn't even bat an eye. The escalation in victim is mirrored in the crime itself—a loud, violent, and fiery car crash. Lia and Mal are throwing caution to the wind and taunting fate.
12. The consequences of throwing caution to the wind and taunting fate—people will notice you. Car Crash Victim has noticed, and is pissed. She causes a huge scene that draws the attention of Peter, Mal's boss.
13. Peter takes note of the argument, but the reason behind him calling Mal into his office is a separate complaint filed against him, by Chad! Just as pleasant as before, the audience shouldn't feel bad that Chad was killed. After the complaint is noted, and Chad excused, Peter gives Mal a warning with a thinly veiled threat about the consequences of continuing to break the rules.
14. Lia's touching base with Angie. It reintroduces Angie to the story, reminding the audience that she's there and important, and also works to humanize Lia after her killing spree.
15. This scene is where Mal passes along the warning to Lia, and they decide to run away together. Mal is willing to risk his job and his life to escape with Lia, and she's willing to give up everything she's ever known and die to be with him. It's a huge decision and the end of Act II.
16. Their last hurrah, a final date before setting off, a goodbye to everything thing either of them has known. But Lia's date cancels last minute. So the options are to give up this final moment and rush into the unknown or have someone else take that guy's place. There's only one person who Lia can call and count on to show up. Lia doesn't want to kill Angie, she has second thoughts up until it's too late, but she feels like there's no other choice. Angie is what is good, she brings out the humanity in Lia while Mal is unempathetic and strips Lia of her humanity in the guise of love. They're two warring sides, one must win and the other must lose. If Lia is going to give up everything to be with Mal, she has to give up Angie even if it hurts. This scene isn't about Mal and Lia's last super, it's about Lia coming to terms with her decision.
17. Angie is not capable of believing that Lia knowingly killed her. They are best friends, so that realization would mean calling into question every single about their friendship, about who she knows Lia to be, and about who she is herself. In this scene, she's in denial and shock so she's lashing out and blaming the only other person that can be blamed—Mal. This commotion draws attention to them and brings Peter out to see what's happening.

18. Having already warned Mal, Peter confronts him with new evidence of his continued wrongdoing. This is the scene where everyone know it won't work out for Mal and Lia. When her name appears, Peter keeps Mal in the office and sends Dave. This is the setup for the climax, for the fight we know they're going to lose.
19. Lia has come to terms with her decision. Dave showing up in Mal's place lets Lia know what their plan has failed.
20. Knowing the end is near, Mal makes a desperate attempt to escape and go to Lia.
21. Lia tries to get away, while we watch the poison shut down her body. She doesn't deserve a quick death.
22. Mal is caught, but continues to struggle.
23. Lia won't give in, even when she's almost completely paralyzed.
24. Peter kills Mal. He broke their sacred rules, betrayed his duty, and given a chance to stop continued anyway. Mal knew that he wouldn't get away with it, but he still tried because he loved Lia.
25. Lia dies, and Dave collects her soul. She didn't get her happy ending, instead she died scared and alone.



# **Costume Design**

## ***'Til Death***

### **Lia**

1. Wrap dress, hair down, everyday makeup
2. Jean, boots, blouse, hair is styled, everyday makeup
3. Flowy skirt, blouse, hair down and styled, date makeup
4. Sweats, tattered and cut up shirt, messy bun, fuzzy socks, "no" makeup
5. Jeans, nice sweater, boots, scarf, hat, hair down, slightly darker date makeup
6. Slinky dress, heels, hair down, heavy date makeup
7. Flowery dress, flats, hair up and styled, everyday date makeup
8. Jeans, boots, blouse, hair braided, everyday makeup
9. Nice dress, hair half up, date makeup

### **Angie**

1. Scrubs #1, "Head Nurse" badge, hair up, everyday makeup
2. Scrubs #2, "Head Nurse" badge, hair up, everyday makeup
3. Sweats and a tank top, messy ponytail, "no" makeup
4. Scrubs #3, "Head Nurse" badge, hair up but falling down, everyday makeup
5. Scrubs #4, hair down, everyday makeup smeared

### **Extras**

1. Everyday clothes
2. Nurses- scrubs, Patients- gowns
3. Nurses- scrubs, Doctors- white coats
4. Nice dresses and suits
5. Reapers- black and white suits, Refugees- wet and tattered everyday clothes, wet hair

### **Mal**

Black suit, white shirt, black tie, short dark hair, silver watch

### **Barista**

White shirt, apron, cap, name tag

### **Collapsing Man**

Slacks, polo



**Distraught Woman**

Jeans, blouse

**Dave**

Black suit, white shirt, no tie, should length shaggy hair, watch

**Mr. Smith**

Jeans, light colored tee shirt

**Woman**

Jeans, short sleeved shirt, hair down, "no" makeup

**Hostess**

Black pants, black button down, name tag

**Bartender**

Black pants, black button down, name tag

**Chad**

Too tight shirt, boots, slicked back hair, creepy mustache

**Crash Victim**

Workout clothes

**Guards**

All black suits, sunglasses, close cut hair

**Peter**

Pale grey suit, short hair

# Production Design

## *'Til Death*

- **Lia's Apartment**
  - Cozy, well worn, upcycled furniture, open concept
- **Coffee Shop**
  - Small, table and chairs away from the counter, bakery section, warm colors, large windows, think Starbucks but not a chain
- **Bistro**
  - Waiting area with the hostess, bar behind them, seating area off to the side, quiet warm environment, cloth napkins, brown versus black color scheme
- **Parking Lot**
  - Grocery store parking lot, far side, mostly empty
- **Road**
  - Need permission to close section of the road
  - Country road with cornfields on either side, debris everywhere, twisted metal, small fires, rolling tires, a wrecked car off the road, blood seeping around the car
- **Lia's Car**
  - Popular model, pristine condition, no personal touches
- **Bridge**
  - Need permission to close off the bridge and nearby sections of the trail
  - Wide walking bridge overlooking a river, in the woods, low railing along the bridge
- **Nurse's Station** (INT. of the Hospital)
  - White and beige color scheme along the walls and floor, nurse's station is a long desk partitioning the hallway, covered in colorful decorations and knickknacks, the hallways are mostly empty, paperwork is in the background
- **Bench** (EXT. of the Hospital)
  - Greenspace and/or sidewalk across from the hospital, visibility on the ambulance bay, no more than two hundred yards away from the hospital
- **Office/Peter's Office**
  - An open area with cubicles or standing desks, the walls are offices.
  - Peter's office is large, there's a wall of shelves with the desk and chairs, modern décor, the color scheme is white and chrome, there's no clutter
  - Mal and Peter's offices are catty corner to each other, this would allow us to cheat the space bigger by using one office for both Mal and Peter and just changing the angles, we only ever see the outside of Mal's office so only the façade would need to change instead of resetting an entire set



# Shooting Script Breakdown

## *'Til Death*

### **Day 1- Monday**

- Locations- Lia's Apartment
- Scenes- 7, 16, 19, 21, 23, 25
- Pages- 9-10, 20-22, 24-26
  - Scene 7
    - Cast- Lia, Angie
    - Costume- Lia outfit 4, Angie outfit 3
    - Props- 2 wine glasses, wine bottle, empty wine bottle, bowl of pretzels, cup of water
  - Scene 16
    - Cast- Lia, Angie, Mal
    - Costume- Lia outfit 9, Angie outfit 5, Mal outfit
    - Props- tablecloth, 2 wine glasses, candles, 2 plates, silverware, wine bottle, powder, potholders, phone, apron, pan of lasagna
  - Scene 19-25
    - Cast- Lia, Angie, Dave
    - Costume- Lia outfit 9, Angie outfit 5, Dave outfit
    - Props- same as Scene 16 but in disarray
- Note- scenes 19, 21, 23, and 25 are really just one scene that is intercut with another so they will all be filmed as scene 19 continuously to maintain flow

### **Day 2- Tuesday**

- Locations- Bistro, Coffee Shop
- Scenes- 9, 1
- Pages- 12-15, 1-2
  - Scene 9
    - Cast- Chad, Bartender, Hostess, Mal, Lia, Extras
    - Costume- outfits for Chad, Bartender, Hostess, and Mal. Lia outfit 6, Extras outfit 4
    - Props- scotch, martini, vial with liquid, half full wine glasses, dirty plates, cloth napkins
  - Scene 1
    - Cast- Barista, Collapsing Man, Distraught Woman, Mal, Lia, Extras
    - Costume- outfits for Barista, Collapsing Man, Distraught Woman, and Mal. Lia outfit 1, Extras outfit 1
    - Props- phone, muffin, 2 to-go coffees



### **Day 3- Wednesday**

- Locations- Parking Lot, Road, Bridge
- Scenes- 10, 11, 8
- Pages- 15, 15-16, 10-12
  - Scene 10
    - Cast- Lia, Crash Victim
    - Costume- Lia outfit 7, Crash Victim outfit
    - Props-2 cars, pliers, bunch of wires
  - Scene 11
    - Cast- Lia, Crash Victim, Mal
    - Costume- Lia outfit 7, Crash Victim outfit, Mal outfit
    - Props- small fire, tires, debris, wrecked car, candles, blanket, Tupperware of food, picnic basket
  - Scene 8
    - Cast- Lia, Mal, Woman
    - Costume- Lia outfit 5, Mal outfit, Woman outfit
    - Props- book

### **Day 4- Thursday**

- Locations- Nurse's Station, Bench
- Scenes- 3, 14, 15
- Pages- 2-4, 18-19, 19-20
  - Scene 3
    - Cast- Lia, Angie, Mal, Extras
    - Costume- Lia outfit 1, Angie outfit 1, Mal outfit, Extras outfit 2
    - Props- 2 to-go coffees, Epi-pen
  - Scene 14
    - Cast-Lia, Angie, Mal
    - Costume- Lia outfit 8, Angie outfit 4, Mal outfit
    - Props- 2 to-go coffee cups, files, papers
  - Scene 15
    - Cast- Lia, Mal
    - Costume- Lia outfit 8, Mal outfit
    - Props- shredded coffee cup

### **Day 5- Friday**

- Locations- Nurse's Station, Bench
- Scenes- 4, 6
- Pages- 4-6, 7-9
  - Scene 4
    - Cast- Mal, Lia, Angie
    - Costume- Mal outfit, Lia outfit 2, Angie outfit 2

- Props- 2 to-go cups of coffee, handkerchief
- Scene 6
  - Cast- Mal, Lia, Extras, Mr. Smith
  - Costume- Mal outfit, Lia outfit 3, Extras outfit 3, Mr. Smith outfit
  - Props- 3 to-go cups of coffees, cup carrier, 2 cars, blood

## **Day 6- Saturday**

- Locations- Office, Peter's Office
- Scenes- 2, 5, 12, 13
- Pages- 2, 6, 16-17, 17-18
  - Scene 2
    - Cast- Mal, Collapsing Man
    - Costume- Mal outfit, Collapsing Man outfit
    - Props- pamphlets, appointment book
  - Scene 5
    - Cast- Mal, Dave
    - Costume- Mal outfit, Dave outfit
    - Props- 2 notecards, planner
  - Scene 12
    - Cast- Mal, Crash Victim, Peter, Dave, Extras
    - Costume- outfits for Mal, Crash Victim, Peter, and Dave. Extras outfit 5
    - Props- pamphlets
  - Scene 13
    - Cast- Mal, Peter, Chad
    - Costume- outfits for Mal, Peter, and Chad
    - Props- files, paperwork, manila envelope

## **Day 7- Sunday**

- Locations- Office, Peter's Office
- Scenes- 17, 18, 20, 22, 24
- Pages- 22-23, 23-24, 25, 25, 26
  - Scene 17
    - Cast- Angie, Mal, Peter, Guards
    - Costume- Angie outfit 5, outfits for Mal, Peter, and Guards
    - Props- NA
  - Scene 18-24
    - Cast- Mal, Peter, Guards
    - Costume- outfits for Mal, Peter, Guards
    - Props- files, paperwork, manila envelope, list of names
- Note- scenes 18, 20, 22, and 24 are really just one scene that is intercut with another so they will all be filmed as scene 18 continuously to maintain flow



# Scene Aesthetics

## *'Til Death*

Organized according to shoot day

### Day One- Monday

- Scene 7
  - Warm lighting “coming” from several of the lamps in the room, to help emphasize the hominess.
  - Inductive opening with shots of the furniture and décor, landing on Angie sitting on the couch.
  - End with a slow zoom in on Angie’s face as she delivers her line.
- Scene 16
  - Inductive shots of the dining room—tablecloth, candles, places set. Cut to inductive shots in the kitchen—bottle of wine, powder being poured in, shaking the bottle.
  - End with a close up of the kiss.
- Scene 19
  - Deductive opening using a wide on Lia as she pets Angie’s hair. Wide angle to exaggerate the emptiness of the apartment and make Lia seem small.
  - End with a medium shot using a wide angle lens as the chair falls, landing between Lia and the camera.
- Scene 21
  - Wide shot as Lia pushes the chair off and Dave waits patiently off to the side.
  - End with a close up on her face.
- Scene 23
  - Medium shot of Lia crawling, use a narrow angle lens to close her in.
  - End with a medium shot on Dave.
- Scene 25
  - Same medium shot, Dave reaches his hand out.
  - End on the same shot, not out of focus before cutting to black.

### Day Two- Tuesday

- Scene 9
  - Lighting is mostly flat, with lamps in the restaurant adding some warmth.
  - Deductive, start high and wide outside the restaurant as cars circle the parking lot and follow Lia as she walks inside and past the crowd to the Hostess.

- End on Mal walking away toward Chad, use a wide angle lens to create a lot of space between Mal and Lia.
- Scene 1
  - Natural lighting through the windows, warm lighting and hanging lamps match the décor inside. Vectors (layout of the tables and chairs, the extras) point to Collapsing Man.
  - Inductive opening of the bakery, signs, general décor before a wide shot. Use wide angle lens to enhance the distance between Lia and Collapsing Man, but narrow angle lens to make the line seem cramped.
  - End on Mal walking out of frame, the glass door behind him shining light in his absence.

### **Day Three- Wednesday**

- Scene 10
  - Natural, overcast afternoon light.
  - Inductive opening on footfalls, pliers tapping against Lia's leg, and her hand twirling a mess of wires. Cut to a wide shot as she gets to her car, use a wide angle lens to make the parking lot seem even more desolate and empty.
  - End with a close up of the gear shift going into drive.
- Scene 11
  - Deductive opening with an aerial shot of the cars going around a bend, closing in on Lia's car. Cut to an over the shoulder shot of Lia inside her car. Inductive as we see what she sees of the wreckage.
  - End using a wide angle lens to create depth of field with Mal and Lia kissing as the middle ground, the lit candle as the foreground, and the overturned car and pooling blood in the background.
- Scene 8
  - Soft, pale light filtered through the trees.
  - Inductive wide shots of the scenery before landing on the bridge where Lia is. Use a narrow angle lens when looking at the water to make it appear close and inescapable.
  - End using a wide angle lens as Mal walks away, Lia turns her profile to the camera as she touches her lips and smiles.

### **Day Four- Thursday**

- Scene 3
  - Bold, bright colors that decorate the nurse's station will provide a nice contrast to the desaturation in scene two. Cool, flat, overhead lighting to mimic hospital lighting, but not as harsh.
  - Inductive open starting with an extreme close up of the coffee cup pulling away from Lia's lips.
  - End with a medium-close up on Mal turning and smiling.



- Scene 14
  - Slightly inductive opening of a close on Angie drinking her coffee, cutting to a two shot at the desk.
  - End with a reaction shot of Angie.
- Scene 15
  - Inductive opening with Mal's head in his hands, Lia's fingers ripping the paper cup, at her line "What if you just ran off?" cut to a two shot.
  - Ends with a wide shot of the park, then on the bench along a third.

### **Day Five- Friday**

- Scene 4
  - "Natural," overcast lighting outside.
  - Deductive opening, overhead shot of Mal sitting on the bench, high jib coming down. Wide angle lens when he sees Lia to exaggerate the distance between them for comedic effect.
  - End on a medium shot of the door closing behind Mal, the glass reflecting the sky and/or park across the street.
- Scene 6
  - Inductive opening shots of a tapping foot, coffee carrier, Lia's eyes suddenly looking up. Use a narrower lens for when Mr. Smith is dropped off to make it feel like a personal intrusion.
  - End with a wide shot of Lia amongst the hospital staff, high up and angled down but not an aerial shot.

### **Day Six- Saturday**

- Scene 2
  - Flat lighting to add to the blandness of the office space. Slightly desaturated to allude to the otherworldly aspect.
  - Deductive opening, start with a wide shot then a two shot.
  - End on a close up of Saturday on the calendar.
- Scene 5
  - Deductive open shots, stay relatively wide with the closest shot being a medium, except for the inserts of course.
  - End with Mal opening the door and the frame flooding with white light.
- Scene 12
  - Deductive wide shot of the bustling bullpen that Mal and Crash Victim walk into.
  - End with a close up on Mal as he walks to Peter.
- Scene 13
  - Lighting is harsher and whiter inside Peter's office, but still slightly desaturated.
  - Inductive opening shots of the shelves, knickknacks on the desk, Peter's crossed hands panning up. Peter gets the power shot.

Between Peter and Mal, Peter is shot slightly upward, Mal slightly downward.

- End with a wide shot of the room, the two sitting across from each other.

### **Day Seven- Sunday**

- Scene 17
  - Follow from behind Mal, the attention's on Angie. Narrow angle lens to make her attack more personal and the office seem claustrophobic.
  - End with a medium shot on Mal as he's pushed out of the frame.
- Scene 18
  - Deductive opening using a wide shot and a narrow angle lens to make Peter's office claustrophobic and seem like everything is closing in.
  - End with a close up of Mal's reaction.
- Scene 20
  - Open with a medium shot of Mal.
  - End with a static shot as Mal runs past and toward the doors, use a wide angle lens to elongate the distance to the doors.
- Scene 22
  - Same shot, Mal gets body checked before reaching the doors. Medium shot of him on the ground as the Guards pull him up.
  - End with a close up as he jerks away.
- Scene 24
  - Close up on Mal's forehead.
  - End using a medium-wide shot as the light floods from Mal and he goes limp.



# SWOT Analysis

## *'Til Death*

### **Strengths:**

The premise is original and creative, it's not something that has been done before. The dark comedy approach is unexpected for such a dark story, upending people's preconceived notions about what will happen and their own reaction to it. All of the pre-production work is done, and it would only take printing out all the pages and passing them out at a meeting to jump start the production. Rather than taking months of planning, the production could instead be ready in a matter of weeks and even then it would be based around purchases and location agreements, not actual planning. For a film that would end up being around thirty minutes, and has a total of ten locations, it would only take a week to film based around eight hour days, with no early call times or overnight shoots. This is a very condensed timeline, but doesn't require cast and crew to work twelve to fourteen hour days, show up at five o'clock in the morning, or work all night. This means that there's no need for a recovery day, and everyone should be refreshed and able to give it their everything for all seven days.

### **Weaknesses:**

Availability and size of the cast and crew are major concerns. The cast has seventeen roles not including extras. While a few of them might be able to be played by the same person carefully disguised, it is still a very large group of people who all have different schedules. The crew would need to be around fifteen people as well, given the size of the production roles cannot be combined the way they usually are student film sets. Costume and makeup would need to be two separate people. The Director of Photography would need a camera operator and an assistant camera, if not two. The lighting department would need to be a department, not just one gaffer and his handful of lights. Then on the production side there would need to be an Assistant Director, a Unit Production Manager, a separate location scout, and at least one script supervisor. It will be a large crew. Trying to coordinate all of those schedules into a week where everyone is free will be exceptionally difficult. Filming would probably not take place during a semester because of that and would be relegated to a break. Filming during a break presents its own challenges because it limits people's availability and it raises the issue of being able to house and feed people that normally would be several hours away at home. Another weakness is that of the budget. Being able to house and feed over thirty people, buy costumes, and set design is expensive and would require crowd funding. Meeting a crowd funding goal is not impossible but it is difficult, and it requires having a marketing campaign to maximize the network of people associated with the production who might donate money.



## **Opportunities:**

Any production of this size is going to present a dozen amazing opportunities, of both the fun kind and the creatively taxing kind. For costuming there's always Goodwill, but we could also pool everyone's clothes together and see if any are viable options for the actors. There's also the option of pairing projects up, where someone who is studying clothing design could make costumes as a part of their class or thesis project. For production design, using things people already have as props, or creating or repurposing things bought at Goodwill are preferable options to outright buying props and set décor. Asking local shops to donate empty coffee cups as product placement, or approaching student artists to display their artwork at the set décor. It's challenging, and takes a lot of prep work but it's an amazing way to be creative and give other people the chance to show off their creativity too, and it's free. Also depending on the budget, there's the option to create our own sets to fake locations. Taking an office space and redecorating it to look like a nurse's station, or filming the exteriors not at a hospital and using visual effects to manipulate the façade afterwards, are both options that would be incredible, although the access to those resources is unclear.

## **Threats:**

The largest threat by far is lack of resources. The hospital, for interior and exterior, is one third of the script and cannot be written out. Which means there are only two options: film at a hospital or fake a hospital. Filming at an active hospital is riddled with legal problems and is nearly impossible unless you have ridiculous amounts of money. Non-hospital entities that are passable (nursing homes, health centers, urgent cares, doctor's offices, etc....) are more lax in their legal restrictions but have very narrow timelines and also like money. So without significant financial support filming on location is not an option. Faking a hospital is a cheaper option but is still expensive, and means needing an area that is a blank slate for upwards of a week. It will take days to build a set from almost nothing and tear it back down, on top of the days needed for actual shooting. As a student, access to that sort of space is incredibly difficult to obtain, especially on a timeframe shorter than six months. This creation of space is only for the interior scenes at the nurse's station, exterior scenes would require intensive location scouting to find areas that would work for an on location shoot and could also be built up digitally to look like a hospital. It would also mean having someone whose visual effects skills are capable of creating that type of digital landscape. Without access to any of these resources, one third of the script is unfilmable.



## Author's Statement

### *'Til Death*

Dawn Schoonover

My thesis project started out about a year ago. I knew that I wanted to write a script and make a short film, and have the actual production be my thesis, but that required having an idea to turn into a script and then a movie. Over the past few years I had ideas and projects that I thought maybe could turn into my thesis, but somewhere along the lines the ideas would stop or it would morph into something much too complicated to actually produce. I was beginning my senior year at square one. I had a few ideas circulating in my mind, all having to do with life and death in some shape or form. My top three options were a modern retelling of Hades and Persephone, a personified love story between life and death, and woman who falls in love with the Grim Reaper and becomes a serial killer. I spent at least a month talking these ideas over with friends of mine, and from a production standpoint the last seemed the most doable. And so *'Til Death* was born.

I knew this had to be a dark comedy, there needed to be a counterpoint to the death and psychologically traumatizing material and comedy allows for that. A lot of my favorite movies are dark comedies, like *Harold and Maude*, and I had just produced a fifteen minute long film that won awards the semester before which was also a dark comedy so I was familiar with the genre. As morbid as it sounds, I was really looking forward to the different ways I could kill people, and how to inject humor into those situations. Whether it was Lia's "Or the water" line which was generally received with gasps and disbelieving chuckles to the juxtaposition of a romantic, candle lit dinner next to a horrific car crash with blood smeared across the road—it was a lot fun to mix humor into the horror.

I absolutely love taking people's expectations, turning them upside down, and then going at them with a hack saw. I try to have that moment in everything that I write, especially since movies nowadays tend to stick very heavily to their archetypes with only slight variations to make them different. I like to go between completely disrupting audience expectations and surpassing audience expectations. *'Til Death's* entire premise is based around it being a love story, and there are so many tropes associated with love stories and chick flicks which are often wrapped up in pastel love and portrayed as perfection that are actually very harmful and I had the opportunity to show that side of them. The major trope I worked with here was the "sacrifice everything for love" theme that usually gets played out in the sense of career, individuality, or the person's hopes and dreams. In *'Til Death* this is taken to the extreme where the sacrifice made is literal human sacrifice rather than an emotional one.

Regardless of the amazing opportunity to poke fun of romantic comedy flaws, the real reason I wanted to tell this love story is because of the type of love story it would be. One that is all-consuming and destructive, that brings out the worst in people rather than the good, one whose only redeeming quality is the love. I'm a huge fan of the show *Hannibal* and the ancient Greek play *Medea* that I studied in Honors 201. The show and the play both have that type of destructive love story where the connection between the two people is beautiful but toxic and in the end destroys them. So I really tried to incorporate some of the elements from those relationships into Lia and Mal, specifically the presentation of murder as a gift from *Hannibal*



and the obsessive yet redeeming qualities of love from *Medea*. It's very rare to have love stories portrayed as negative and grotesque. I was really excited to take that on and see how I would be able to do it and what people's reactions to it would be, and I'm very happy with how it turned out.

*Hannibal* is my favorite TV show and my dream job; if it ever gets picked up for a fourth season I am willing to drop everything and move to Canada. From the story and dialogue to characterization and costume design to production design and cinematography, it is perfection to anyone in video production. Knowing that it's the same genre and has the same type of relationship between its two leads that I was looking for in *'Til Death* meant it was an inspiration not only for the script but in how I did the pre-production. Most of the comedy in the show comes out of Hannibal's near constant puns and double entendres about cannibalism and the fact that the audience gets those jokes when the characters don't. I really wanted to play off that for Lia's interactions with her victims but it only worked out well with the Woman and Crash Victim, one with dialogue and the other with ironic juxtaposition of setting.

Within the show, Hannibal views his murders as art with a controversial medium, and over the course of the series he and Will Graham turn them into gifts for one another, a public display of their affection and commitment. I did not want Lia to get pleasure out of killing people, but view it as a means to an end. However, I did want to romanticize it as a presentation of a gift. Lia is proving her love to Mal, she's willing to take a life in order to see him and he finds that romantic. With Chad, the Crash Victim, and Angie their romantic dates are right in the middle of gore and death and not only does it not bother them but it almost seems to set the mood. I think it's really cool to try to make something beautiful out of something so garish.

Which leads to the relationship itself, in the show Hannibal and Will are painfully aware that their love story is one of mutually assured destruction, it adds tension and makes their sacrifices for one another all that more meaningful and dramatic. But with that comes sadness and doubt which were elements I did not want in Lia and Mal's relationship. I wanted them to have the air of innocent first love, to see the happiness in each other that they couldn't find anywhere else. For me, that meant making them blind to the consequences, and getting to play with both their expectations of a happy ending and the audience's expectations of a happy ending. I sacrificed that level of deeper understanding and connectedness for the sake of story structure.

Pure psychopaths are incapable of empathy and therefore cannot form emotional connections with other people, which makes them very rare. Like Hannibal, Lia is not a pure psychopath but does lean very heavily toward psychopathic tendencies making emotional connections exceedingly difficult. *Medea* on the other hand, is manic and psychotic but I wanted that similar level of obsession for Lia, where love is the only thing left to balance out the horrible things they've done. They would give anything to prevent that love from being destroyed, and when it is they have to face the moral consequences of their crimes and it does not end well. Lia kills her best friend for another chance to see Mal and *Medea* basically has a psychotic break and murders her children. It's a different take on the all-consuming-sacrifice-everything type of love which is so often put on a pedestal in Hollywood movies.

Following a traditional three act structure, *'Til Death* includes all of the appropriate structural elements. These are the inciting incident, plot point one, midpoint, plot point two, low of lows, climax, and resolution. Traditional three act structure also follows strict pacing,



meaning these elements must occur at certain times to maintain balance. The inciting incident happens within the first few pages, plot point one at the one-fourth mark, midpoint at the one-half mark, plot point two at the three-fourths mark, with the final three elements having fluidity to occur at any point in Act III as long as they're in order. This is the breakdown for *'Til Death*: The inciting incident is when Lia and Mal meet for the first time on page one. Plot point one, at the end of Act I and the transition to Act II, is when Mal reveals himself to Lia on page eight. The midpoint is when Lia actively murders someone on page thirteen. Plot point two, at the end of Act II and transition to Act III, is when Lia and Mal decide to run away together on page twenty. The low of lows is Angie's death, the climax Mal's death, and resolution Lia's death which are on pages twenty-two and twenty-six. For a twenty-six page script this means that plot point one was thirty percent in, midpoint fifty percent, and plot point two seventy-six percent. In total, Act I was one page longer than it should have been but everything else was perfect pacing. All of these points also occurred during one of Lia and Mal's dates to help with the pacing of their relationship and add heightened significance to their dates which the audience will subconsciously pick up on.

The production itself hit a road block the last week of March. In the script, the hospital location is where one third of the action takes place, but hospitals are very difficult locations to get. My advisor and I spent January through March trying to find this location, we looked into hospitals, nursing homes, retirement homes, clinics, morgues, anything that could pass for a hospital or be rewritten into the script and still work. About halfway through March a friend of mine found a nursing home roughly an hour away that would work and looked great. I started talking to them about dates and got my crew together, and then the last week of March they cut off contact with no warning or reasoning. At that point there were six weeks left in the semester, it was barely enough time to film and edit let alone spend another two to four weeks finding a location. The production became unviable.

This was my thesis; I cared about it. I had spent over six months on this project and brought on some of my closest and most talented friends. I was disappointed I wouldn't get to make my film, and that I would be graduating in video production without having something that was mine. More than disappointment though I was embarrassed and ashamed that my project failed before we got to filming, and all of the people who had agreed to help and dedicated time to this production were leaving empty handed. I was upset at the situation, mad at the nursing home, and afraid I wasn't going to graduate. Thankfully I had an amazing advisor who has worked in this industry for a very long time and who was able to talk some sense into me. Productions are put on hold all of the time because of problems like this, and are usually fixed by throwing insane amounts of money at people, but as a student with a budget of no money this was not a problem that could be solved in the given timeframe.

My advisor and I had a meeting to discuss what I would do, and came up with the solution to shift my thesis from *'Til Death*'s production to its pre-production. This meant all of the collaborative pre-production work that would be handled in long meetings with the people on the upper production and design teams would instead just be me. The benefit to that is I got to make all of the decisions, but it's also the drawback because the opportunity for collaboration is lost when you work by yourself. Without other people to bounce ideas off of and to provide insights it was really hard for me to figure out what was the best idea and what was worth mentioning.



I am a producer who dabbles in production design, so the organizational and tangibly creative elements are what I'm used to and know that I'm good at. But I haven't touched a camera since sophomore year and I've relied very heavily on the talent and ability of my directors of photography for the technical aspects. They bring their interpretation of the script and work with the director until everyone is on the same page about the vision, and then go off and write up the technicalities with the camera, lenses, equipment, and lighting. I've never really done that, I've always just trusted the people I was working with, so it was a completely new experience writing the Scene Aesthetics. I had to think about approaching the story from an angle I've never dealt with before, and not only analyze what it was I wanted but why I wanted that and how to convey that idea and the emotions attached to it in a technical way that could be reproduced. It was a lot of work and required dusting off some old text books and going through old notes. The process was rewarding to realize I had this capability I didn't know I had.

Even without collaboration from what would have been my production team, I think my designs and analyses are fantastic and I am very happy with them. I'm used to doing this for other people's productions, so it was a big change to be both the person with the vision and the person planning out the vision. Producers are usually the ones who have to crush the director's dreams and make them see the reality of the situation. Getting to be both has only reconfirmed my true nature as a producer because I didn't have to keep myself in check, it was automatic. There wasn't anything I needed to talk myself down from or reconfigure because it was too unrealistic, it was very much more of a producer's approach to directing than a director's approach to producing.

The shift to pre-production also opened up an incredibly amazing door which made me very happy. The fifteen page restriction on the script didn't matter anymore, and all of a sudden there was room to add characterization and backstory. I could spend time to flesh out characters that were not Lia or Mal. The script is twenty-six pages long which is almost double what it would have been in order to make it into a fifteen minute film. The ability for *'Til Death* to be as long as it needed to be was very freeing and absolutely made it a better, more compelling story than it would have been otherwise. This shift also forced me to do things out of my comfort zone which ultimately expanded my skill set and made me a more marketable graduate. I had to look at *'Til Death* from every angle in all aspects of production, and stretch myself to cover every role especially the ones I was not experienced in. Things did not go as planned, but I'm proud of what I've created.